

What is claimed is:

1.

A method of facilitating the contracting of agricultural commodities using the Internet comprising the steps of:

5 providing a Web server connected to the Internet;

providing a centralized database system for the storage and retrieval of data;

10 storing data in the database system relating to types and amounts of agricultural commodities desired by one or more agricultural commodity buyers;

in response to a command input into the system, displaying a listing of desired commodities including information related to the types, amounts or deliveries of the commodities;

15 receiving input data from a supplier of an agricultural commodity relating to a specific type and amount of a commodity which the supplier is willing to supply to the buyer at harvest or at other times; and

20 generating a contract for the sale of the specific type and amount of the commodity by the supplier to the buyer.

2.

The method of claim 1 wherein information inputted into the system is inputted via a Web browser.

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3.

The method of claim 1 wherein information inputted into the system is inputted via an applet in Java or another program language.

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4.

The method of claim 1 wherein the agricultural commodities are comprised of agricultural products.

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The method of claim 1 wherein the agricultural commodities are comprised of commodity grains or oilseeds.

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6.

The method of claim 1 wherein the agricultural commodities are comprised of fruits or vegetables

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The method of claim 1 wherein the agricultural commodities are comprised of animals or fish.

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The method of claim 1 wherein the agricultural commodities are comprised of horticultural products or ornamental plants.

9.

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The method of claim 4 wherein the step of storing data in the database system relating to types and amounts of agricultural commodities further comprises the steps of: storing data identifying a quantity of agricultural products desired by the buyer; and storing data related to a desired allocation of the quantity of agricultural products among a plurality of areas.

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The method of claim 4 wherein the step of displaying a listing of desired commodities further comprises the steps of: displaying a listing of desired agricultural products available in desired areas; and

updating the listing to reflect a change in data as a result of contracting between the supplier and the buyer.

11.

5       The method of claim 1 wherein the contract generated is  
a paper contract.

12.

The method of claim 1 wherein the contract generated is  
10 an electronic contract executed using digital signatures.

13.

A method of facilitating and tracking the contracting of agricultural crops using a wide area distributed network comprising the steps of:

providing a centralized database system for the storage and retrieval of data;

storing data related to the number of acres or bushels of agricultural crops desired by one or more agricultural commodity buyers;

storing data related to the number of acres or bushels of the agricultural crops committed for the production of the crops by one or more growers;

displaying a listing of the desired crops including information related to the number of acres or bushels desired and the number of acres or bushels already committed;

receiving input data from a grower relating to a specific amount of the crop which the grower is willing to commit to the desired agricultural crop; and

updating the data in the database to reflect the additional acres committed by the grower as indicated in the input data so that the listing of the desired crops can be

displayed in real time showing the allocation of acres  
or bushels committed to the desired crop.

14.

5       The method of claim 13 further comprising electronically  
managing delivery times and methods.

15.

10       The method of claim 13 further comprising electronically  
managing quality data for growing or delivered products.

16.

15       The method of claim 13 further comprising electronically  
pricing the contract based on a variable.

17.

20       The method of claim 16 wherein the variable can is  
selected from the set comprising time of delivery and a  
quality measure.

18.

25       The method of claim 13 wherein the centralized database  
system is installed on an Internet Web server, and users of  
the database system access the database system via an  
Internet Web browser.

19.

30       The method of claim 18 wherein the centralized database  
system is installed on an Internet Web server, and users of  
the database system access data using Java or another applet.

20.

The method of claim 13 wherein the agricultural crops further comprise agricultural products.

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21.

The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of allocating the stored data relating to the number of acres of agricultural crops desired among a plurality of elevators.

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22.

The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of allocating the data related to the number of acres of the agricultural crops desired into distinct geographic regions.

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23.

The method of claim 13 further comprising the step of allocating the data according to one of the following: product type, time of delivery, method of delivery, end-user buyer.

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24.

A method of maintaining the integrity of data in a database system in which data is entered into the database system by a user using an Internet Web browser comprising the steps of:

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providing a control script which uses a limited amount of state data stored by the Internet browser during the execution of a task, the state data stored by the browser identifying a subset of master state data stored in the database system;

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entering the state data stored by the browser into the database system to update the subset of the master state data upon the completion of the task; and

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preventing the state data stored by the browser to be entered into database system and updating the subset of the master data when the task is aborted by the user.

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25.

An apparatus for contracting for agricultural commodities over a wide area distributed network comprising:  
an application/web server;  
a database server;

10 a communications link between the application/web server and the database server and the wide area distributed network;

one or more remote user terminals;

software on computer storage medium which facilitates:

15 storing data in the database system relating to types and amounts of agricultural commodities desired by one or more agricultural commodity buyers;

in response to a command input into the system, displaying a listing of desired commodities including information  
20 related to the types, amounts or deliveries of the commodities;

receiving input data from a supplier of an agricultural commodity relating to a specific type and amount of a commodity which the supplier is willing to supply to the  
25 buyer at harvest or at other times; and

generating a contract for the sale of the specific type and amount of the commodity by the supplier to the buyer.

26.

30 A system for contracting for agricultural commodities over a wide area distributed network comprising:  
a central computer system in operative communication with a wide area distributed network;

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a plurality of widely distributed seller computers in  
operative communication with the wide area distributed  
network;

a plurality of widely distributed buyer computers in  
operative communication with the wide area distributed  
network;

a database stored on said central computer system containing  
data related specific type and amount of a commodity  
which the seller is willing to supply to the buyer at  
harvest or at other times, and types and amounts of  
agricultural commodities desired by one or more  
agricultural commodity buyers;

so that, in response to a command input into the system,  
buyers and sellers can form contracts related to the  
types, amounts or deliveries of the commodities.

27.

The system of claim 26 further comprising a software  
security component to restrict access to the system.

28.

The system of claim 27 wherein the software security  
component comprises varying levels of access to data by  
authorized users of the system.